



Safety Bulletin 70

Risk – Controlling risk in a workplace

As part of managing the health and safety of your business you must control the risks in your workplace. To do this you need to think about what might cause harm to people and decide whether you are taking reasonable steps to prevent that harm. This is known as risk assessment and it is something you are required by law to carry out. **If you have fewer than five employees you don't have to write anything down.**

A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your workplace. You are probably already taking steps to protect your employees, but your risk assessment will help you decide whether you have covered all you need to.

Think about how accidents and ill health could happen and concentrate on real risks – those that are most likely and which will cause the most harm.

For some risks, other regulations require particular control measures. Your assessment can help you identify where you need to look at certain risks and these particular control measures in more detail. These control measures do not have to be assessed separately but can be considered as part of, or an extension of, your overall risk assessment.

When thinking about your risk assessment, remember:

- A **hazard** is anything that may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, an open drawer etc.
- The **risk** is the chance, high or low, that somebody could be harmed by these and other hazards, together with an indication of how serious the harm could be

How to assess risks in your workplace

1. Identify the hazards

One of the most important aspects of your risk assessment is accurately identifying the potential hazards in your workplace. A good starting point is to walk around your workplace and think about any hazards. In other words, what is it about the activities, processes or substances used that could injure your employees or harm their health?

2. Decide who might be harmed and how

Think how employees (or others who may be present such as contractors or visitors) might be harmed. Ask your employees what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious to you and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks.



3. Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions

Having identified the hazards, you then have to decide how likely it is that harm will occur; ie the level of risk and what to do about it. Risk is a part of everyday life and you are not expected to eliminate all risks. What you must do is make sure you know about the main risks and the things you need to do to manage them responsibly.

4. Record your significant findings

Make a record of your significant findings - the hazards, how people might be harmed by them and what you have in place to control the risks. Any record produced should be simple and focused on controls.

If you have fewer than five employees you don't have to write anything down. But it is useful to do this so you can review it at a later date, for example if something changes. If you have five or more employees you are required by law to write it down.

5. Review your assessment and update if necessary

Few workplaces stay the same. Sooner or later, you will bring in new equipment, substances and procedures that could lead to new hazards. So it makes sense to review what you are doing on an ongoing basis, look at your risk assessment again and ask yourself:

- *Have there been any significant changes?*
- *Are there improvements you still need to make?*
- *Have your workers spotted a problem?*
- *Have you learnt anything from accidents or near misses?*

Make sure your risk assessment stays up to date.

Many organisations, where you are confident you understand what's involved, can do the assessment themselves. You don't have to be a health and safety expert.

Should you require any further assistance or guidance around controlling risk in the workplace, please contact us on info@wpsafety.co.uk or 01268 649006

Source: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE)